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# Dedication To Create Make Believe

*Kenneth Anger talked to Tony Rayns and John DuCane*

Kenneth Anger was born in Hollywood, and acted in Max Reinhardt's movie of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at the age of four. He was introduced at an early age to the ideas of Aleister Crowley, the English Mage, which have strongly influenced his life, and the films he has made. He is currently living in London, working on his first feature-length film, 'Lucifer Rising'. Meanwhile, a programme of some of his earlier films shows at the NFT on Sunday: 'Fireworks', the classic statement of adolescent insecurities and the passage into manhood; 'Puce Moment', the only completed section of 'Puce Women', which would have celebrated the great potential Hollywood once had; 'Rabbit's Moon' (shot in 1950 but edited this year)—a parable of a young man's infatuation with movies and their illusory delights; 'Eaux d'Artifice' in which formal, aesthetic perfection masks a narrative of frivolity and failure; 'Scorpio Rising' which takes the concept of leadership (be it Hitler or Christ or Marlon Brando) to its violent, necessary end; and 'Invocation of my Demon Brother' which demonstrates that one's true 'demon brother' may be manifest when one least expects. 'Rabbit's Moon' and 'Lucifer Rising' also show at the London Film Makers Co-op on Saturday.

## Hollywood

How important was Hollywood to you?

*My relationship with Hollywood began when I was four years old, when I realised that they had let my option drop. I saw myself with a future as a child actor, and decided they had made a terrible mistake by not signing me up for a lifetime contract. I'd be a willing capitalist slave to Jack Warner to this day, if they wanted it, the way lots of art is worked for Lorenzo de Medici—but, uh, bread and butter. Fuck politics; whether we're left or right wing is immaterial to an artist, perhaps. The creative artist is divinely unscrupulous, and will accept any political creed that will allow him to express himself, no matter what form of subversion is necessary. We've seen this brilliantly illustrated in films this century by the 'Bolshevik' Eisenstein and the 'Nazi' Riefenstahl. Both of them were strictly only interested in themselves as creative artists.*

*So my relationship with Hollywood smacks of Aesop's fable of The Fox and the Grapes; over thirty years (and then some) I have developed a case of enormous, petrified, extremely sour grapes over the subject of Hollywood. There's that marvellous German word that explains the essence of the German soul—'Schadenfreude'—that peculiarly Hunnish pleasure in seeing your enemies fall to pieces in front of your eyes. All I've had to do is sit back and wait 30 years to see the whole empire of Hollywood Babylon crumble into dust.*

Anger in 1957

*Naturally I had to learn sooner or later to make films with a funny little Kodak in my back yard, because they wouldn't give me a great big back lot to play with—what Orson Welles got, but he was a bigger bluff than I hope to be . . . I sent one film ('Fireworks') over to the Festival des Films Maudits in Belgium, and what do I get back—not a prize, but a sweet note from Jean Cocteau, saying he thinks it's a masterpiece, coming from the dark night of the soul, which impressed me a lot at that age. So I got on the next boat and arrived at the door of the Paris Cinematheque; they showed the films and paid a little more attention . . .*

*'Puce Women' was my love affair with mythological Hollywood. A straight, heterosexual love affair, no bullshit, with all the great goddesses of the silent screen. They were to be filmed in their actual houses; I was, in effect, filming ghosts. When I couldn't get any bread from Freed or Kelly at MGM the project was doomed, because a freeway to the San Fernando Valley was put through all those lovely 1920 houses. That was a sad day for Hollywood, the beginning of the end, when Whitley Heights went.*

*I am a conservative, meaning that I cherish things of value. This places me at the antipodes of a cheap hustler like Andy Warhol, who is the garbage merchant of our time. And more power to him—he's got a lot of garbage to choose from, it's not hard. He's chosen to paint pictures that he's very proud will chip off and fall to pieces in ten years . . .*

*My approach to art is the Egyptian one, and I am building for Eternity. You might as well make it in steel or carve it in the hardest granite. If it's the statue of the god or goddess you adore and it takes you twenty years to make, the chances are that an eye, a smile, a wrist, something of that figure is going to survive, maybe even when mankind is just a question mark in future archaelogy.*

*Before I started making movies, I made puppet shows, and I'd do Chinese legends that I wrote myself—they were always Oriental. One was called 'The Banana'*—that was my first script. I may still be making it, I think you're doomed to repeat yourself in that department, the first love somehow lingers.*

## Magick

*Every film I've ever made has tried to impose upon the mind of the watcher an alternative reality. It's the dedication to create Make Believe.*

Anger and Gordon Ray in 'Fireworks'

What's the function of the Magick signs that are superimposed over the action in some of your films?

*These devices are barriers to the area of the mind that I want to block out: the Cartesian frontal framework. They're keys to get frequencies through to the great Collective Unconscious, in which I totally believe (thanks to Grand-daddy Jung—every sane man should believe in this one truth of the 20th Century, that we're all family on that level—or else, maybe we should just, uh, forget it). I will blip in a 2-frame shot of a 'trademark' for the very good reason that sooner or later I want people to buy the product. I'm engaged in a long-term selling campaign. I have one product that I'm selling: the 20th Century's most misunderstood genius, called Aleister Crowley. This message has been behind my first puppet play, my first film 'Who Has Been Rocking my Dream Boat', 'Fireworks', 'Puce Women', 'Pleasure Dome', 'Invocation of my Demon Brother' and now 'Lucifer Rising'. And also, incidentally 'Scorpio Rising', which is something that happened along the way—you might call it a test pilot.*

'Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome'

*Let me give a concrete example. My line of goods is like a patent medicine show. I hold up to the audience a box that looks like an ordinary medicine bottle, and they have to take my word that the contents of the bottle are Magick. It does have something inside; it's transparent and looks like water, but it could be nitro-glycerine. We'll know that I have a certain sign that I can flash, which is so simple it's like somebody scratching their head, which is a key to let's say an alchemical [illegible] or a golden flower, or a Venusian computer (if you want to get funny) like changing the world.*

*Crowley crept into my life in [illegible]*

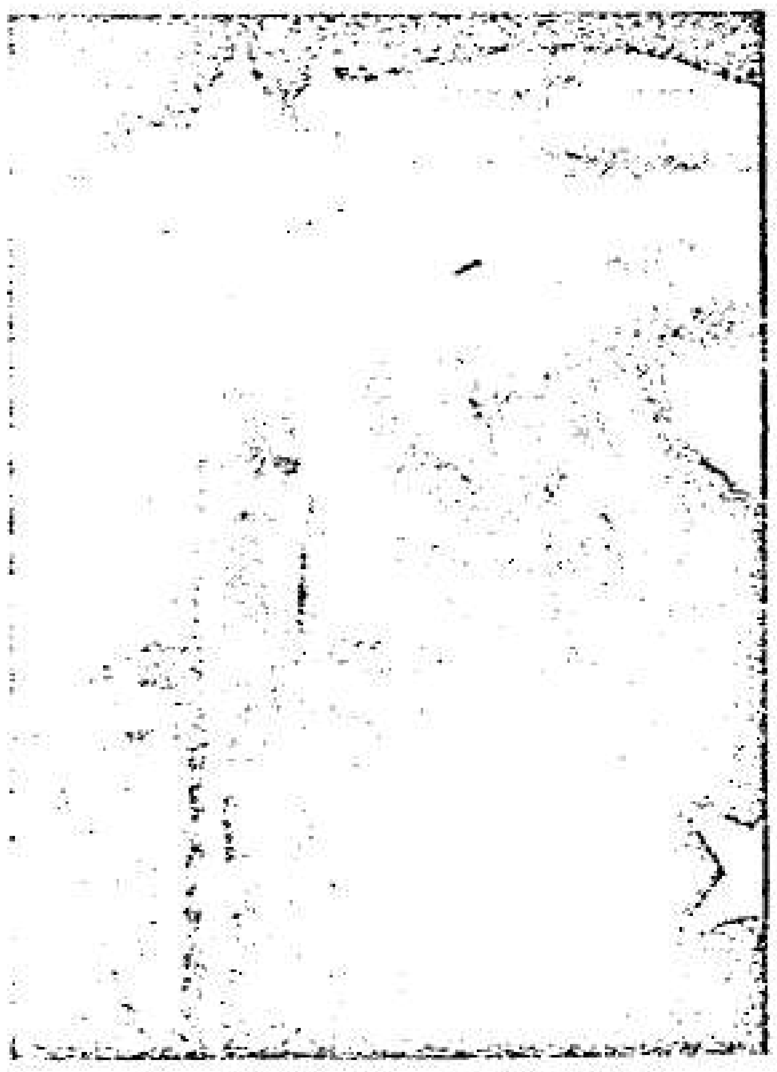
* misprint: should read " The PRINCESS THAT Fell in Love with the BANANA

Anger

Crowley

[illegible], through my grand-mother's [illegible] tales to me, which are the first [illegible] I remember. Little aphorisms—as when young Aleister asked his Daddy what was that clump of stuff growing in the backyard in Leamington Spa, Daddy, in his Plymouth Brethren wisdom, said 'Don't you dare touch that—it's stinging nettles, and you'll be very sorry.' Aleister Crowley's 4-yr-old answer was 'Wheee!' as he leaped and spread [illegible] in the nettle patch, where he was very happy to giggle back at Big Daddy for 72 years. Because when you join the Magickal view of the universe, you are coming into one fucking big nettle patch for life. And I mean stinging nettles.

The metaphor of the nettle patch is that if you accept the Magickal view of the universe, you are so close to out-and-out madness that if you allow your [illegible] of concentration to waver for even a minute, you're out of the nettles and into the fiery lakes of insanity—that is the allegory of hell. The Circles of Hell is a very careful cellular analysis; this is a highly developed psychic scientist, who is dissecting the computer world of the brain and showing that there are these abysses—some from which you cannot climb back, some you can risk . . . even if it means you get cut up and stare for eternity at your own head, mouthing back at you all the bad things you've allowed yourself to be quoted saying . . .



'Invocation of My Demon Brother'

## Pleasure Dome

**Why did you go back to America to make 'Pleasure Dome?'**

*Because America is the Pleasure Dome of the world. Even the Chinese bitch in their blue cotton drawers for the American Pleasure Dome. The materialistic dream is so strong, that you have to be of the purity of Parsifal to banish Klingsor's castle, and tell all the flower-girls to go to hell with their own illusion. It's like what the Arabs promised their warriors in the Hashish Paradise—this is what you want, this is it, this is the feeling, nothing else but the feeling. Africa's going to buy it, Asia's going to buy it, they're going to get their two cars and colour TV set, and they're going to love it and hate it, like everybody else. They'll use up the last vestiges of the rare minerals that our crust contains, on a bunch of bullshit. Like the alchemists predicted: 'If you nourish these veins in the rocks, and pray to the gnome that protects it, he will secretly replant the garden with the crystals and minerals'—so that the Nibelungen gnomes, for instance, will rebuild the gold mines, and the silver mines. But the gnomes are being treated so shabby, it makes Uncle Walt's treatment of the Seven Dwarves seem like a beatification . . .*

*The Magician's challenge is that he declares outfront to the powers that be: 'Fuck the mystic path, I'll settle for the siddhis.' In other words, Saint Theresa and company can go find their way right up there to the white light, but we're going to stick down here in the rainbow lightshow, because we find it a gas, and we like colour. So, you say you want to play the Magick game. This means you become a source of energy that reacts on other inert objects in a chain reaction, for better or worse. The Magician is sublimely indifferent to the morality of this—what you call good and evil for the Magicians of the world is just a big giggle, because it makes no difference.*

**So where do you want to manipulate audiences to?**

*I asked Aleister Crowley in a dream why he was always whispering in my ear to lead the other little kiddies up the garden path . . You promise them anything at the end, but* take them along, *like it's an adventure and they're going to find something unexpected. The masses of the world, the people that we love, that I* adore, *all I want to see them do is line up with their last sheckel and drop it in the slot marked 'Kenneth Anger' and go into my Nickelodeon. I mean, it's very egotistical, but you'll have what's promised in the ad—a total experience—though it's up to you whether you come out with a blinding headache. In other words, there'll always be a penalty to pay for these artificial paradises.*

## Kindergarten

*The answer is that anything you pay your admission for is dissatisfaction, because, in the final analysis, you've been had. Say you decide one evening you're going to go out and have dinner or go to a flick—well, you should be balling your chick, very seriously, nothing else but getting yourself into the right frame of mind to make beautiful love. You see how the poor little dears are wasting their realities? Because they're letting chemicals do things for them rather than finding it in themselves and agreeing to enter once again the Great Big Kindergarten. That's why McLuhan is a great prophet—the media are going to create a new kind of mass that Marx never dreamed of; whether it's in the hands of the Chinese, the Russians, the South American military juntas, the Saudi Arabians or the German/Americans doesn't really matter—they'll all be playing these games.*

*Well, you are the people who wanted to be entertained. You have passed time you have sat with me for an evening. You'll never have that evening again, and it's all used up. You spent your evening away from your own reality while another reality was sitting on your head. It's like a party where you try on paper hats: some will see that it's a party (which is the whole point) and they'll fit, others will suddenly feel that they have something sitting round their head and that their nose is sticking out from under the brim, and they can't see a fucking thing. But you can't win 'em all, you really can't.*

*So in the time I have left, I'm grimly determined to make a feature film, in which I can lead people further up that garden path. So I can invite, in a sense, a few hundred or thousand people to my surprise party . . . and have it at least one evening . . .*

The first part of 'L'Histoire d'O'

**A selection of the films of Kenneth Anger show at the Co-op on Saturday (13a, Prince of Wales Crescent, NW1 267 4907) and at the NFT on Sunday at 4.00, 6.15, 8.30. (See NFT and Club listings for details).**

The films of Kenneth Anger are available from Vaughan Films, Fouberts Place, W1 (437 1551)